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A

SERMON

Preached before the

KING & QUEEN,

At WHITE-HALL,

ON

CHRISTMAS-DAY, 1689.

By the Right Reverend Father in God, *GILBERT*
Lord Biſhop of SARUM.

LONDON,

Printed for Richard Chiſwell, at the *Roſe* and *Crown*
in St. *Paul's Church-Yard*, MDCXC.

THE

BISHOP of *SALISBURY*'s

Sermon before the KING and QUEEN

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1 TIM. III. VER. 16.

And without controverſie, great is the myſtery of godlineſs: God was manifeſt in the fleſh, juſtified in the ſpirit, ſeen of Angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, and received up into glory.

THE moſt venerable part of Religion conſiſts in the Myſteries it contains: and the more ſacred and ſublime that theſe are, the Religion to which they belong, becomes thereby ſo much the more Auguſt. The minds of Men are ſubject to two extreams in the matter of Myſteries: ſome have ſuch a liking for every thing that pretends to *Myſtery*, that this alone ſerves to recommend all things to

them; and as if Religion were deſigned to give perpetual affronts to Reaſon, they deſpiſe things that are intelligible, and think it is a Character of a mean and contemptible Religion, if it is not full of unaccountable things: and they ſeem to be ſo taken with a ſickneſs after *Myſtery*, that the more abſurd that any Doctrines are, they like them the better: this ſerving to gild or ſweeten the Pill: and perhaps they think that a fond credulity will atone for all other faults; as if an eaſineſs of believing might ſerve to compound for the moſt hainous ſins. But on the other hand, ſome have ſuch thoughts of themſelves, and of the force and compaſs of their own Reaſons, that they think it an unreaſonable impoſing on them to expect that they ſhould believe any thing which they cannot quite comprehend.

The Mean between theſe, is to fix ſuch ſure meaſures in this matter as may preſerve us both from a tameneſs, that may expoſe us to be an eaſie Prey to every one that will force perſwaſions on us, with this bugbear, that they are *Myſteries*, and that therefore they ought to be believed, even before they are examined: and alſo on the other hand, from ſuch a ſwelling of pride, as to reject every thing

thing how ſolemnly ſoever atteſted, only becauſe it does not agree with our Notions. We have St. *Paul* here in my Text concluding a charge that he had given to *Timothy*, and in him to all that ſhould miniſter in *holy things*, that he ſhould from the Rules here ſet him, learn how he ought to behave himſelf in the *Church of God*: for ſince the World that is ever apt to be implicit in its thoughts of Religion, will judge of that which they do not know, nor underſtand, I mean the Doctrine, from that which they do ſee and know, I mean the lives of thoſe who do teach and profeſs it; and ſince the Majeſty that is in ſome Myſteries requires a ſuitable authority and gravity in thoſe that handle and propoſe them; therefore the obligation that lies on Churchmen to a great exactneſs of deportment, appears particularly from this, That the Myſtery of their Religion is *without controverſie great*; and that it is likewiſe a *Myſtery of godlineſs* that leads to Right thoughts of God, and to a way of worſhipping him, that is ſuitable to his Nature and Attributes: both which conſiderations agree to point out this to us, That the Biſhops and Paſtors of the Church ought to be Men of a ſublime pitch of mind, and of an unaffected ſtrictneſs of holineſs.

In

In ſpeaking to theſe words I ſhall conſider,

I. What is the true and ſtrict Notion of a Myſtery in general.

II. What reaſon there may be for us to believe ſuch Myſteries as may be revealed to us by God.

III. How credible the Myſteries mentioned in my Text are in themſelves.

IV. What reaſon we have offered to us that obliges us to believe them.

V. In what ſenſe this is a *Myſtery of godlineſs*.

I. *Myſtery* in its common and general Notion, is a *Sacred Secret*: and it was chiefly applied by the Heathens who firſt uſed the word, to thoſe Rites and Ceremonies by which Men were either initiated into Religion, or reconciled to the Deity: and the performance of theſe things, had in it many ſecrets which the Prieſts were careful enough to conceal, and thereby to encreaſe their value. Among the Romans it was one of the Methods by which the People were managed to make them believe that publick misfortunes riſe from ſome error in the performance of the ſervice that they paid their Gods. A Deputation of fifteen Men who were

of

of the moſt intire confidence was appointed on great occaſions; to examine the Rituals of their Religion; and theſe either found or pretended they had found out, both the error that had been committed, and the proper Remedy: upon which it was given out, that the offended Deity was pacified, and thereupon the People that were out of heart, took new courage; and this to be ſure, contributed not a little to the procuring them better Succeſs. From this common uſe of the Term *Myſtery*, it is applied in ſome places in the New Teſtament, to ſome of the Rites and Doctrines of Chriſtians.

Marriage is ſaid to be a *Myſtery*, not as if there were any thing Myſterious in that Compact, which is founded on the Laws of Nature and Society: but St. *Paul* had been ſhewing the reciprocal tie that is between the Man and the Wife; by which it appears that a Man can no more have two Wives, than a Wife have two Husbands: and upon that he ſays, That in this lay a *Myſtery* relating to *Chriſt* and the *Church*; that is, a myſtical Argument to prove that the *Gentiles* were to be brought to equal priviledges in the Diſpenſation of the Meſſias with the *Jews*: for the Prophecies having expreſſed the Union of God with Mankind, in the Meſſias, under the figure of a Marriage, then it follows according Ephes. 5. 32.

to the Allegory of a Marriage, that all must be called to him in an equality of priviledge and dignity; and not as the *Jews* imagined, that they were to have many Priviledges under the Messias above the *Gentiles*, who were only to have a second share after them. Now in the Mystical way of arguing which was in use among the *Jews* at that time, it was no ill way to convince them, to shew that the whole Church was to come as one Wife under the same Priviledges: otherwise a disparity in that, some having more and some fewer, looked like the State of Polygamy, or Concubinate, and not of a single Marriage.

But to return from this digression: The Sacraments of the Christian Religion came to be also called *Mysteries*, because in these, Men were initiated and confirmed in their Religion; yet not by any secret methods that Priests only might know, but in actions that were plain, simple and significative.

This great Doctrine of the Christian Religion, mentioned in my Text, of God's dwelling among us in flesh, is likewise called a *Mystery*, as containing in it, not any secret which was too sacred to be trusted to Lay-hands, that Priests only might know; but carrying in it a sublime discovery of the Divine Nature, and of the Person and Conception of the Saviour of the World.

And

II. And this leads me to the ſecond point, which is to ſhew, That if any ſuch extraordinary diſcovery is made, we ought not thereupon to be prejudiced againſt it, becauſe it contains ſome things, of which we can form no clear and diſtinct Notion. It ſeems indeed at firſt view a hard impoſition on us, to require us to believe that of which we can form no thought at all, and which by conſequence is nothing to us. It ſeems alſo unreaſonable to think that God has given us Faculties which yet we muſt contradict and overrule in matters of Religion. But all this, how much ſoever it may be enlarged, and how ſpecious ſoever it may appear, will have leſs force when it is conſidered, That really our Faculties are ſo defective, that we do not penetrate into the Eſſence of any one thing whatſoever; and therefore tho' we can never be obliged to believe any thing that is contrary to our Faculties and to our ſimpleſt Conceptions, yet we may be obliged to believe things in which we find Difficulties, through which we cannot make our way.

The notions of *Time*, *Space* and *Motion*, are entangled with inextricable difficulties; the continuity of *Matter*, or the admitting of *Vacuities* in it, are ſubject to no leſs exceptions; but theſe are matters of a more remote ſpeculation: That which is more ſenſible to every one, is, That there are in

us thinking Beings, which we call *Souls*, that are united to Beings of a quite different nature, which are *Bodies*, in ſo ſtrange a manner, that the acts of the Mind give the Body a great variety of motions: We *will*, we *reaſon*, we *remember*, *ſpeak*, or *move*, and immediately our animal Spirits go into the Chanels into which they are directed, without miſtaking their Way or their Errand. Now, how the acts of a Mind ſhould give, or, at leaſt, direct the motion of Matter, is as unconceivable to us, as how the motions of Matter ſhould give a Mind Pain or Joy; yet after all, in fact we find it is ſo, though we can give our ſelves no reaſonable account how it ſhould be ſo. Indeed, if we examin *Memory* alone, it affords us matter enough for wonder; for it is not conceivable, how we ſhould have lodged in our Brain the Figures of all words, perſons, and things, which we can call up when we pleaſe, and ſo quick as words come into our Mouths when we ſpeak: Now, what the Nature, the Variety, and Order of all theſe Figures ſhould be, is that which we can as little underſtand, as how the Soul ſhould read them, (if I may ſo ſpeak) and be able to do nothing without them. Thus it appears, that in the thing which of all others we ſhould be like to underſtand beſt, I mean our own Souls dwelling in our Bodies, and acting upon them, we plainly per-

perceive, that a thing may be true, though at the ſame time all the notions that we can form of it do preſent to us difficulties concerning it, which we cannot overcome.

It will then be no prejudice againſt Religion, if it ſhould offer ſome things to us, that we can as little reconcile to our own notions, as we can do, that of our Souls lodging in our Bodies, and governing them. It ſeems indeed to be very unconceivable, how the ſame Perſon ſhould be both *God* and *Man*; but it is not a whit more conceivable, how the ſame *Man* ſhould conſiſt both of *Body* and *Soul*, ſo united in one, that the Properties of both ſhould belong to the ſame man, who from the characters of his Mind, may be ſaid to be *juſt*, *wiſe*, and *good*; and from the characters of his Body, may be ſaid to be *tall*, *fair*, or *ſickly*. So that though theſe, ſtrictly ſpeaking, belong only to one part of a *Man*; yet the denomination from each of them, goes to the whole.

It cannot be denied, that our Souls are united to our Bodies, though we do not conceive how it ſhould be ſo; for we muſt conſider, that all that which is imported by this Union, is, that our Bodies being put and kept in ſuch a mechanical texture and diſpoſition, our Souls act upon and govern them, both in their vital and their free or rational Operations: And this Government

vernment is called the *Union of our Soul and Body*; which is no other than the Bodies being put and kept in ſuch a Mechanical State, that the motion of the Animal Spirits runs regularly through it, which way ſoever the Acts of the Mind do determine and direct it; and when the ſtructure of the Body is ſo diſordered, that the animal Spirits do their work imperfectly, then Pain and Sickneſs follow upon it; but when they can do nothing, then Death comes, the Body being no longer in a diſpoſition to be ſubordinate to the Mind. By vertue of this Union, the Mind receives likewiſe many Senſations from the Body. All which lead us very near the forming ſomewhat like a notion of the *Union* of the *Two Natures* in Chriſt. For, if a *Body*, which is a different ſort of Beings from the *Soul*, is capable of being brought under ſuch an immediate and conſtant direction from the Mind, as we ſee it is in our ſelves; then it is not at all abſurd to think, that the Soul of a man ſhould be brought under an immediate and conſtant actuation from the Divine Nature, which may as well denominate God and Man to be one, as the Union of the Soul and Body denominates the Compound of both to be one Man: and as the whole Man has the Attributes both of *Soul* and *Body* given to him, ſo the whole in our

Saviour

Saviour may also have the Attributes both of *God* and *Man* given to him. And this is as true an Union, as is that between Soul and Body; only whereas the *Body* gives sensations of Pain and Pleasure to the *Mind*, by vertue of the Union between them, the perfection of the Divine Nature is such, that it can receive no reciprocal Returns from the Humane Nature; though it does immediately and constantly act upon and conduct it.

I do not pretend, that this does fully explain the *Mystery*, but it brings it nearer to our Thoughts: So that if it does not help us to comprehend it clearly, yet it carries us so far toward it, that we perceive that it is not impossible: and that is all which is at present offered at.

There is somewhat in the Old Testament, that will also contribute to give us a more distinct notion of this Mystery. There was a Mass of shining Matter that hovered over the *Cherubims*, which was wrapped about with a Cloud; and it sometimes broke through it, and gave Answers to the *Israelites*, when they consulted God by the High-Priests. This had at first appeared to the whole Nation, in the Wilderness, and rested on the top of the Tabernacle, and went before them in their March, and was the Exod. 40. 34, 38.

lasting

lasting character of God's Presence among them. It was the standing Miracle of their Religion, which none of their Idolatrous Kings could ever disprove; and it continued among them till their Temple was destroyed by the *Babylonians*. Now this *Cloud* was called *God's Face*, his *Glory*, and *the Light of his Countenance*, and even *God* himself. *O thou that dwellest between the Cherubims, shew thy self, and shine forth.* And yet never was there any thing more carefully managed, than the diverting that People from every step that might have any tendency to Idolatry. So the true account of this Cloud's being so spoken of, is, That this Mass of pure and bright matter, as well as the thicker Cloud that was folded about it, must have been quickly dissipated, according to the Laws of Motion, all Flame being quickly gone, if not fed by new Fewel; but that God by an act of his Power, kept it constantly in that fixed state, and did sometimes make it break through the Cloud to declare his mind to his People that consulted him. So by vertue of the constant impression that God made upon that matter, he was said to be in it; and by vertue of that, the Cloud is said to be GOD.

Psal. 80. 1, 2. 2 *Kin.* 29. 15. *Psal.* 99. 1.

Now,

Now it was propheſied, that the Glory of the ſecond Temple ſhould be *greater than the Glory of the firſt*; and this Cloud, in which God was preſent, being the proper *Glory* of the firſt, and it being wanting in the ſecond, a higher degree of *Glory* was God's not only acting upon, and appearing in a Maſs of dead matter; but his acting upon and appearing in animated matter, in a Man that had all the Principles and Ingredients of our Nature in him. And thus this *Myſtery* that *God was manifeſt in the fleſh*, has nothing in it that can render it any way Incredible, either from the Principles of Reaſon or Philoſophy, or from the diſcoveries that were made concerning God in the *Old Teſtament*. *Hag* 2. 9.

As for another part of this *Myſtery*, that our Saviour was born of a Virgin, that carries not any thing in it, which reaſon ſhews to be abſurd or impoſſible. For all matter being uniform, and only different by the figure and motion into which it is put, as God did upon the firſt creation of matter, put it into what Form he pleaſed, he can ſtill put any part of it, into what ſhape or motion he intends to Impreſs upon it: ſo that there is no difficulty in apprehending how God could have formed the firſt Principles of our Saviour's Body in the Virgin. And it being neceſſary that the Author of ſo

holy a Religion ſhould be perfectly pure and holy, that he might be a perfect Pattern, and ſo recommend his Doctrine with the more advantage, it was ſuitable to this, that he ſhould have none of thoſe frailties in his Nature and Conſtitution, which might have expoſed him to the failings, into which the beſt Men that have their Natures vitiated with thoſe ill Inclinations, are apt to fall. It is certain, that with the firſt Principles of our Being, there are derived to us the Seeds of ill Diſpoſitions, both of Body and Mind. Cronical Diſeaſes, ſuch as Gout and Stone, Folly and Madneſs, are thus derived; and tho' this is in ſome Inſtances more viſible and ſenſible than it is in others, yet as every Man has ſome particular feebleneſs, of which ſome Principles deſcend to thoſe who derive their being from him, ſo in all Men this is ſenſible, that their Bodies and bodily Impreſſions grow too hard for their Minds, and do always ſtruggle and often revolt againſt them. It was then ſutable both to this Holy Religion, and to the Union unto which the Divine Nature aſſumed the Author of it, that he ſhould be free from all that diſorder; and therefore the matter from which he was to take his beginning, was to be ſo exactly rectified and purified, that there ſhould be no Principle of ill Inclination in it: for we perceive

perceive that our Minds act ſo much the more perfectly, the more pure and clear, that our Bodies are: We grow as our Bodies ripen, to be another ſort of Beings, than we were when we were firſt born; and a Diſtemper in our Brain, may ſo hide or diſorder all our Ideas, that we may thereby become in a moment fit for nothing: nor ſhall it be a ſmall part of our happineſs in another ſtate, that our Bodies ſhall be highly rectified, and ſo our Minds muſt become both purer and ſublimer when they ſhall dwell in Bodies of heavenly and exalted matter. Upon all this, it is plain, that as there is no abſurdity in believing that our Saviour's firſt Principles were formed by Miracle, ſo it was highly ſuitable to the deſign on which he was ſent into the World, that his Body ſhould be freed from all that diſorder which follows the ordinary courſe of Nature.

III. But yet after all this, it may ſtill be ſaid, why muſt things of this nature be required to be believed of us? why was this Doctrine of Chriſtianity, which is hard enough in practice, made ſo much the harder, by containing in it ſo many things which render it ſo difficult to be believed? And why were ſuch prejudices laid in the way, both of *Jews* and *Gentiles*, by making theſe Doctrines to be parts of our Faith, which ſeemed to

ſavour of their moſt abſurd Fables, as if there were in the Godhead a deſcent from *Father* to *Son*? To all which this is to be anſwered, that as there was no Doctrine more ancient and ſacred among the Philoſophers, than this of Three in the Deity, which is well known to all that have well examined the matter, ſo nothing could more recommend a Religion, that was to meet with great oppoſitions both in the nature of Man, and from the Powers that were then in the World, than the great Dignity of the Author of it; and therefore, as he was brought into the World with ſo much Pomp, ſo many Propheſies going before his Birth, and ſo many Miracles accompanying it, a whole Nation being ſelected, out of which he was to deſcend, and a Religion being Inſtituted that was full of Types and Ceremonies that were to be accompliſhed in him, ſo God thought fit to veſt him with all poſſible Glory; that ſo his Doctrine might not only have the more credit, but that all Men might be the more encouraged to come into it, and to continue in it, by the great Aſſiſtances and the mighty Protection that they were to expect from One that was the *Head of Angels*: and was alſo *the brightneſs of the Fathers Glory*: and ſince it was neceſſary to draw Men to think ſeriouſly of Religion, by offering them a full and free Pardon

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of all paſt ſins, it being in vain to preſs Men to come into any Religion, if they are told that by their ſins they are already become miſerable, paſt Recovery and Redemption; God therefore as he reſolved to offer a Pardon in the Goſpel, ſo thought fit to do it in ſuch a manner, as ſhould declare his hatred of ſin, as well as his love to mankind; and therefore he ſo ordered it, that the Author of this Holy Religion after he had fully declared it to the World, ſhould be ſeized on by wicked Men, and be by them cruelly put to death; in the ſuffering of which, as he offered himſelf up with all ſubmiſſion to the Will of God, and bore every thing with all imaginable patience; ſo he felt in his mind, the moſt unconceivable ſenſe imaginable of the ſins & miſeries of mankind, and of the offence done to God by ſin, which raiſed in him the vaſteſt Agonies poſſible; all which concurring to make his Sufferings moſt exquiſite, muſt have overſet a human force, if it had not been ſupported from a higher Principle: And as it pleaſed God to accept this of him, as a Sacrifice for the ſins of the World, and to Crown him in reward of it, not only with *honour and glory*, *but by giving him all power both in heaven and on earth*; ſo he conferred on him, an Authority of giving eternal life to all that ſhould believe on his Name; and receive his Holy Goſpel, and live according to it: and therefore ſince the making mankind eternally

Matth. 28. 18. Heb. 2. 9. & 5. 9.

happy

happy, was a deſign of ſo high a Nature, it was ſuitable to ſo Glorious a Project, that the Perſon in and by whom all this ſhould be wrought, ſhould be raiſed up to the higheſt pitch of Glory poſſible.

Thus though it is always a bold Queſtion to ask, why were things ſo ordered by God? Since if they are declared to us by him, we ought to conclude, without any further enquiry, that they were ordered according to the beſt and moſt infallible Reaſon, even tho' we ſhould not be able to find it out; yet here even we, can diſcern a great ſutablenes in all theſe high Myſteries, to the great Deſign of God in this Holy Religion.

IV. But yet in the next Place muſt be acknowledged that we ought never to be too eaſie in believing things, that ſeem hard Impoſitions on us; and that therefore there ought to be a degree of certainty and clearneſs in the Revelation of any ſuch thing, that is proportioned to the weight and the extraordinary nature of that which is propoſed to us; for as in the common affairs of life, an ordinary degree of Evidence ſerves to perſuade us of an ordinary thing; but if ſomewhat that is very much out of the way is told us, we then are in the right, not to believe it, till we find it is well atteſted to us; and that by a very good Authority. So in Divine matters ſuch Precepts

of

of Morality as agree with our Natures and the ends of human Society, may be eaſily received, as needing no extraordinary authority to recommend them to us; but if Doctrines that are more above us are laid upon us, we ought to examine well the authority upon which they reſt, that ſo we may not become too eaſie a prey, to every one that thinks to ſubdue us with the terrour of the word *Myſtery*. Since then that the acknowledging that One who as to all his outward appearance was a Man, like unto us, was alſo the true and the *great God*, or the *Son of the living God*, carries ſuch an uncouth ſound in it, that it naturally affrights and ſtartles us, it is neceſſary that though the poſſibility of this has been already conſidered, yet that before we believe it, we be ſure that it is a Truth, which is clearly revealed to us by God; for a thing of this kind muſt appear in the Scripture, if it is at all in it, with ſuch an Evidence as muſt put it paſt all doubt; ſince it is not ſuitable to the deſign and ends of Divine Revelation, that a thing which is both ſo dark and yet ſo important, as this muſt be acknowledged to be, ſhould be revealed, ſo as to be proved only by Hints, Inferences, or ſome Paſſages that are capable of a double meaning.

Now in purſuance of this, we muſt obſerve two things; 1*ſt*. That there is nothing which is more expreſly

expreſly forbid in the Scriptures, than the giving Divine Adoration to a Creature. Idolatry is no other, than the Worſhipping thoſe *that by nature are not Gods*; and even the Old Teſtament for all the Compliances that were in it, to ſenſible nature, yet allowed of nothing that looked like Idolatry; and this is much leſs to be imagined in the New, that carries Religion in all reſpects, to a higher degree of Sublimity and Purity than the Old did: This then is to be laid down for a Principle, that nothing is propoſed to us in the New Teſtament, as the proper Object of our Adoration, but God himſelf. In the next place, it is no leſs plain, that all the Acts of Worſhip, ſuch as Adoration, Prayer, Praiſes, Faith, and Confidence, and in a word, every Act by which we teſtifie our dependance on God, and our Homage to him, is declared to be due to *Jeſus Chriſt* in the ſame words, in which it is ſaid to be due to *God* himſelf; therefore when theſe two things are laid together, the reſult of both is, that either the New Teſtament is the moſt Incoherent and the worſt compoſed Legend that ever was Writ, in which one main and eſſential Point is contradict by another, or that *Jeſus Chriſt muſt be truly God.* It is certain, that he is either ſuch, or we Chriſtians that pay him Divine Adoration, in ſo ample a manner as we do, are the greateſt Idolaters that ever were.

Galat 4. 8.

Revel. 5. 8.
Heb. 1. 6.
Heb. 13. 15.
John 14. 1.
2 Cor. 12. 8, 9.

And

And as this is contained in the New Teſtament, in expreſs words, ſo the whole Doctrine that is revealed in it, was atteſted in ſo eminent and ſo indiſputable a manner, as to leave no pretence to Infidelity; ſo many Prophecies concurring in the Perſon of our Saviour to prove him the true *Meſſias*, promiſed to the Jews many Ages before; and ſo many Miracles appearing, firſt at his Birth, and afterwards in the whole courſe of his Life, but above all at his Death, his Reſurrection, and Aſcenſion.

The Apoſtles publiſhed the Hiſtory of all this ſoon after it was done, and mentioned many Circumſtances that were involved in it; which, if falſe, might have been authentically overthrown by the Jews, in whoſe Hands the Authority was lodged at that time, and who had both Intereſt and Malice enough to ſet them on to make the Diſcovery. One part of the Story was ſuch, that it is not poſſible to believe that it could have paſt upon the World if it was not true. The Apoſtles pretended, that after the Holy Ghoſt was poured out on them, they not only wrought Miracles, but had likewiſe the Gift of Tongues. Now this was ſuch a thing, that if it was falſe, it was in the power of every one of any ſtrange Nation, to make the Diſcovery, and by ſo doing, to overthrow the Credit of the

whole Gospel. We see, by what both *Suetonius*, *Tacitus*, and *Pliny* have left to us, that the Christian Religion was soon spread up and down the World; and that both in *Rome*, and in remote Provinces, their Numbers and their Maxims, made them to be very considerable. We also see, in the last of these, that he had strictly enquired into their Doctrine, their Worship, and their Course of Life, and had put some of the Women, that were the Deaconesses in the Churches, to the Torture, to draw from them a discovery of such things whereof they were accused: Yet he found nothing but a great probity of Manners, and a great steadiness in adhering to the Doctrine which was believed among them: Upon whose enquiry the Emperor ordered a stop to be put to the Persecution, that was then begun: So that this carries in it, not only an Apology for the Morals of Christians, but a proof of the Doctrines of Christianity; for it being so easy a thing to have confuted them, if these things which the Evangelists relate had been *false*, since they cannot be said to be *cunningly devised Fables*; we cannot conceive how it is possible that their Enemies, who were then the Governing Party, did not discover, and so confound them. Upon the whole Matter then it appears, that God did by a profusion of Miracles,

cles, if I may ſo ſpeak, give this Divine Doctrine its firſt Authority and Credit in the World; and he continued to water what had been ſo planted, with a ſucceſſion of miraculous Powers, which continued for ſome Ages in the Church, and to which the Fathers made moſt ſolemn Appeals, in the Apologies that they writ for their Religion; of which ſome were addreſs'd to the Emperors, and others to the Senate of *Rome*. If theſe Things which they aſſert, and to which they appeal, had not been known to be certainly true, it is not eaſy to determine whether their madneſs in venturing upon ſuch an Appeal, or the Heathens in not joining iſſue with them in it, was the greateſt.

And thus *without Controverſy, Great is the Myſtery of Godlineſs, or of the Chriſtian Religion: God was manifeſt in the Fleſh*, that is, in the Humane Nature of our Saviour, in which he dwelt. He was alſo *juſtified in the Spirit*, that is, proved to be ſo, in the wonderful Evidences of the Divine Power, that were ſolemnly given in the confirmation of it: He was *ſeen of Angels*, the Heavenly Hoſt appearing viſibly at his Nativity, and celebrating the Glory of it; *preached unto the Gentiles* by a company of poor illiterate Fiſhermen, who went about with thoſe mighty Credentials of the Gift of Tongues, and the Power

of Miracles; atteſting the Truth of what they themſelves had ſeen, and known; upon whoſe Evidence *he was believed on in the World, by the Gentiles*, tho rejected by the *Jews*; who being poſſeſſed with falſe Prejudices concerning the *Meſſias*, could not then receive an humble and a ſuffering One, while they look'd for nothing but Triumphs and Conqueſts under him. But this loſs was more than ballanced by the great Multitudes of the *Gentiles*; who tho they laboured under the Prejudices of their Education, and the more biaſſed Liberties which the Heathen Religion allowed them, yet did in great Numbers renounce their Idolatry, and embrace a Religion that both obliged them to a great ſtrictneſs of Life, and alſo expoſed them to many preſent Sufferings, beſides what the firſt Planters of it warned them of, concerning a Perſecution that was quickly to overtake them. We ſee by *Tacitus*, what multitudes of them were in *Rome* in *Nero's* Time; and by *Pliny*, that almoſt all thoſe of *Bithnia* and *Pontus*, both in *Town* and *Country*, were become Chriſtian. And in concluſion, *God* thus made *manifeſt*, was *received up into Glory*; which either relates to his Aſcenſion, when in the ſight of his Apoſtles, while he was talking to them, and bleſſing them, He was caught up, ſo that they beheld him *aſcending up into Heaven*; or this *received in Glory*,

Luke 24. 51. Acts 5.9.

Glory, for ſo it may be rendred, may relate to the glorious Inſtances of God's Power, that appeared in the firſt planting of Chriſtianity: For, as a *Cloud of Glory* had appeared hovering over the Tabernacle, and leading the *Iſraelites* through the Wilderneſs, which gave the chief Authority to the Law of *Moſes*; ſo in this firſt ſetling of our moſt Holy Faith, God ſeemed, as it were, to have made bare his Arm, and ſhewed the greatneſs of his Glory, as well as of his Power. Thus he appeared to St. *Stephen* at his Death, and to St. *Paul* at his Converſion; but above all, the wonderful Effuſion of the Holy Ghoſt at *Pentecoſt*, was ſuch a declaration of his Glory, as far exceeded all that ever had appeared before or ſince.

V. In the laſt place it remains to be conſidered, how this is ſaid to be a *Myſtery of Godlineſs*: The word ſignifies true *Piety*, or the right way of worſhipping God. So the meaning of this is, That the Wonders and Glories which appeared in the Perſon of Chriſt, and at the planting of his Goſpel, are not only lofty Declarations of the Greatneſs and Power of God, and of the Truth of our Religion, upon which we are to value our Selves, and our Doctrines, but that they were all intended by God to give our Religion the more

more Authority, that ſo it might have the more Efficacy upon us, for the reforming and governing of our Lives: for all the uſe that we make of them beſides, is only to boaſt, that we believe a Religion to which God has given *a great deal of Credit*, but to which we will give *none at all.*

By *Godlineſs* is comprehended the having right Notions of God, the worſhipping him ſuitably to theſe, and the framing our whole Lives according to them: And therefore we treat this *Myſtery* but as a ſublime Cant, and not as a *Myſtery of Godlineſs*, unleſs it has theſe Effects on us. When our Minds are by this ſo poſſeſſed with a noble Idea of God and of his Attributes, that we adore his Power, we admire his Wiſdom, and rejoice in his Goodneſs and Love: When we compare the Prophecies that went before, with their Accompliſhment in our Saviour's Perſon; when we obſerve all the Circumſtances of Providence that accompanied this Tranſaction; when from thence we form right Notions of the hatefulneſs of Sin, and of the Purity of the Divine Nature, of his Juſtice as well as of his Mercy; and when from all theſe laid together, our Hearts become full of high and great Thoughts of God, which dwell upon us, and poſſeſs us, then we make it become to us a *Myſtery of Godlineſs* indeed. Beſides, when this leads us to a right Notion of the

the Worſhip of God, as not conſiſting in outward Pomp nor Glory, much leſs in propoſing to our ſelves viſible Objects of Worſhip, or in dreſſing it up, as if it were rather a ſort of *Opera*, than the Worſhip of that God, who has in his Goſpel revealed himſelf to be *Spirit and Truth*, and that he will be worſhipped accordingly. When our Worſhip conſiſts in humble Acts of confeſſing our own Sins, that needed ſuch an Expiation, in earneſt Prayers for a Share in all the Benefits of it, and in ſolemn Acknowledgments of the Wonders of it, and of all thoſe Bleſſings which we are always to own as the Effects of it, flowing to us through it: When theſe, I ſay, are our Thoughts and Exerciſes in the Worſhip of God, then does this become to us a *Myſtery of Godlineſs*. And finally, when our Minds are ſo ſeaſoned with it, that our whole Lives carry the Impreſſions of it upon them; when we are afraid of departing from the Rules of it; when we are ſtrict in obſerving them; when it appears that we highly value the Bleſſing of the Knowledg of the Goſpel, that we are ſenſible of the danger of loſing it, and that we rejoice in it above all other things; and when the Honour of our Religion does ſo affect us, that we are wounded at Heart, when it falls under any Reproach or Suffering, but rejoice in all the Glory of it; when

we

we feel a ſenſible Concern in the whole Body that profeſſes it, and in all the Accidents that relate to it; then do we ſhew that we make this to be, that which truly it is, a *Myſtery of Godlineſs.*

But if we are only proud of our Religion, and factious about it; if it neither works on our Hearts, nor reforms our Lives; if we grow neither the better nor the wiſer for it; if on the contrary, it is only a Pretence to cover ill Deſigns, and a handle to manage Factions by; if it makes us think that we may compound by our Heat in point of Opinion, for our Coldneſs in true Piety, and that Orthodoxy will atone for Immorality; if we lay in fewel for our ill Nature from it; if we make uſe of it to ſerve every End, but that for which it was appointed of God; and in a word, if, inſtead of growing better by it, are really the worſe for it: Then here is the moſt fatal reverſing of the greateſt Deſign that ever was.

In order to the examining the Truth of all this, it is neceſſary for us to conſider, what Impreſſions have the various Scenes that we have ſeen, with relation to Religion, made upon us? How did our apprehenſions of loſing it affect us? Was it only with the ſenſe of a Party, and the anger of thinking that we were depreſſed, and like to be ill uſed? Or did that Scene make us reflect on our Sins, that had rendred us unworthy of ſo great

a Bleſſing, and that had brought us ſo near the danger of loſing it: did we in all that time of Fear and Melancholly, turn to God, repent us of our Sins, and enter into ſolemn Vows of living more ſuitably to our Religion, if God ſhould be ſo gracious as to reſtore it to us? Such a Preparation as this, had made our Deliverance prove a double Bleſſing to us.

And how have we received it? has it been only with the joy of ſeeing our Enemies fall before us, and of finding our ſelves now come in for a turn in the Advantages of Fortune? Does this ſerve only to lift us up upon our Succeſs and Proſperity, and to make us remember all Quarrels, and ſo gratify Paſſion and Revenge? Is our Eaſe and Abundance abuſed into Luxury and Vanity? Are our Hearts lifted up, or our Paſſions ſharpened? and inſtead of parting with our old Sins, are we adding new ones to them? If our Hearts, when ſincerely asked by us, concerning all theſe things, tell us that they are but too true, then we need not wonder if we ſee a ſtand made in the courſe of thoſe Bleſſings, which God has been holding forth to us, but that we have by our Sins not only ſtopt, but turned many of them to Curſes. We ought in that caſe to ask our ſelves, *what have we done?* and *wherein have we troubled* Iſrael? It is but a Melancholly Comfort when a man is full of ſo

ſad a ſpeculation, to think that man is ſo made, that it ever was, and ever will be ſo.

When the Chriſtian Religion in *Conſtantine's* time, became triumphant over all the Powers of Darkneſs, that had conſpired its deſtruction, and that after many Cruel Perſecutions, had ſet on foot the laſt, that was both the bloodieſt and the longeſt of all that had gone before it; in which, for ten years together, the Sword had been made drunk with the *blood of the Saints*; and it was ſo firmly believed that the name of a Chriſtian was extinguiſhed, that Medals were ſtruck to perpetuate the memory of that Performance; when, I ſay, the Chriſtian Religion got out of all this, and had not only Edicts of Liberty in its favour, but was alſo cheriſhed by the Kindneſs and Protection of Emperours; One ſhould have expected that a Society which had been ſo long in the fire, as they had been, muſt have come out of it freed from all its droſs: and that the Chriſtians from the remembrance of the former Perſecution, and the reflections on their preſent Eaſe, ſhould have been ſo full of a ſenſe, both of what they had eſcaped then, and what they enjoyed, that there ſhould have been nothing to be found among them, but Churches full of Devotion, Clergy-men animated with Zeal, and Chriſtians that were an honour to their Profeſſion.

But

But how far was it from all this! Generally Ignorant and Vicious Men were promoted to their beſt and greateſt Sees, who fell into moſt Extravagant Diſputes concerning the Dignity and Privileges of their Epiſcopal Sees. In *Africk* a Breach aroſe upon no greater matter than this, Whether *Cecilian*, the Biſhop of *Carthage*, was ordained by men that had, during the Perſecution, denied the Faith, or not? This was of no great Conſequence, if it had been true; and being a matter of fact that turned upon proof, the caſe was judged againſt *Donatus*, and his Party, who complained of *Cecilian*: but this did not ſtop the Breach, which made ſuch a fatal progreſs, that almoſt in every Town in *Africk* there was a Church formed with a Biſhop over it, that adhered to *Donatus*: and the Diviſion continued above 120 years, and at laſt grew to be a matter of ſo violent an Animoſity, that much Blood was ſhed upon it: and they continued to be deſtroying one another, till the *Vandals* broke in upon them, and conquered, and conſumed them both.

At the ſame time that this Diſpute began at *Carthage*, another was raiſed at *Alexandria*, occaſioned at firſt by ſome indiſcreet Words that paſſed between *Alexander* the Biſhop, and *Arius*; whoſe Spirits being ſharpned againſt one another upon ſecret Reaſons, they aggravated ſome mi-

ſtaken Expreſſions too far: as appears from the wiſeſt Writing of that Age, the Letter which *Conſtantine* writ to them upon this Occaſion: But this was carried afterwards ſo far, that we may ſafely ſay the Spirit and Power of the Chriſtian Religion was loſt in the Diſpute. The Scandals given by the ill Lives, not only of Lay Chriſtians, but even of the chief Biſhops of the Churh, and thoſe no leſs Scandalous Diſputes among them, brought much Shame and Infamy on that holy Profeſſion: which will ever ſuffer, when thoſe who pretend to it, are a reproach to it.

In Concluſion, after a whole Age of God's long-ſuffering Patience and Forbearance, there fell on the Church, both in the *Eaſt*, and in the *Weſt*, a ſucceſſion of the terribleſt Plagues for two Ages together, that is in Hiſtory: One Conquerour coming after another, and waſting what the former had left. And theſe brought on ſuch Famines and Peſtilences upon the whole *Roman* Empire, that all the Hiſtory of thoſe Ages is a continued Scene of Horror and Miſery.

Theſe are ſpeaking things, and are ſet before us for our Terror, as well as for our Inſtruction; to let us ſee what we ought to look for, if not warned by ſuch Terrible Examples, we ſhould ſtill continue to deſpiſe all the Methods of God's Providence, as well the ſeverity of his Judg-

Judgments, as his Long-ſuffering Patience, and Forbearance towards us.

If any had obſerved the Conſtancy and Zeal that appeared in this Nation, for ſome years laſt paſt, when we ſaw our Religion in danger, and that ſcarce any could be prevailed on, ſo much as to give way, much leſs, to concur or comply with the Deſigns that were then on foot; from thence, one that ſaw the matter at a diſtance, would have been tempted to think that we were full of Zeal for our Religion, ſince neither Hope nor Fear could work on any conſiderable Number among us; and from thence one might have been led to conclude, That if God ſhould have delivered us from all that Danger, with a high and uplifted hand, and ſhould have prevented even our Hopes and Wiſhes, in giving us ſuch a quick and cheap Deliverance, as is without Example in Hiſtory; That at leaſt all People ſhould have received this with all poſſible Acknowledgments; and that upon it, we ſhould all have conſidered, what were the cauſes of our late Dangers, that threw us into them; and that we ſhould have agreed in this, That our Diviſions had been from the beginning to the end, the chief Foundation of all our Enemies hopes; that they had been ſet on, and managed by them in order to our Ruin; that nothing

thing made our publick Councils so slow and feeble, and that nothing did so violently distract the Minds of the People, as to see us so broken among our selves, especially in Matters of Religion; and that we should have studied to have healed all differences among our selves; and in Conclusion, that the Effects of so great a Revolution, should have been a visible Reformation among all Ranks and Conditions of People.

But what shall be said, if all this Change of Affairs, has produced no other Change among us, but for the worse? If we are as bad as ever in all respects; if Vices of all sorts have still their free course among us; and if those Animorsities which were generally looked on for some years, as forgot and extinct, are now revived with a new and greater heat; and if different Sentiments, whether with Relation to Sacred, or to Temporal Concerns, should now disturb us in so unseasonable a time, when the Eyes of all the World are upon us, and that all *Europe* expects from hence, a Deliverance from a Tyranny, which has now lain so long and so heavy on it. All these things are sad Indications of our great Indifferency in the Matters of Religion; that after all the talk that has been about them, we either believe them not, or at least, consider them not

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to be as they are indeed, the moſt valuable of all things. But let the World think of theſe things as they pleaſe, in them we ſee the *Power, and the Wiſdom of God*: And as Morality without Religion, will be found to be but a feeble Principle; and ſuch as will only conſtrain a Man to follow his Intereſts, or at leaſt his Pride, which in that Language, is called *Honour*; ſo Religion in general, unleſs it is grounded on a Divine Revelation, will not have ſtrength enough to hold, or govern a Man, it not having foundation enough for much Weight to be laid on it: and therefore here is a ſhort Reſolution of a good Man's Principles. He is perſuaded that God ſent down this Divine Perſon into the World, to declare to us the Will of God; and upon our following it, to aſſure us of the Pardon of Sin, of the Favour of God, and of Eternal Happineſs. Next upon his believing theſe things, he ſets himſelf to the ſerious performance of all that is commanded him by God; in doing which, he finds great inward joy in himſelf, ſince a mind reduced to a calm and quiet ſtate, will feel as real a Complacency in all that is good, as the Eye feels in Light, or the Ear in Muſick; from this ariſes in a good Man, a ſecret Confidence in God; for as he feels that he is conforming himſelf to his Will, ſo he grows aſſured of the Favour

vour and Love of that infinitely good God; out of that there ſprings in a good mind, a perpetual ſource of Joy; he is walking with God, and ever delighting himſelf in him; and this Joy goes far beyond Life, and all that is preſent; it ſhoots out into another World, and gives him both a proſpect of Eternity, and alſo ſome earneſts of it. This is the ſtate of a truly Godly Man, he feels himſelf happy, but rejoyces becauſe he believes he ſhall be infinitely more ſo, when he ſhall be in a ſtate where he ſhall perfectly comprehend that, which is now to him the *great Myſtery of Godlineſs*; To which State, God of his infinite Mercy bring us, through Jeſus Chriſt our Lord. *Amen.*

FINIS.

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